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ABSTRACT

Schools that students experience as safe and supportive will be more successful at promoting student achievement and developing qualities such as good character and citizenship. However, this commonsensible priority is sometimes slighted when other issues demand a school's attention. This guide identifies four core elements necessary to create and maintain safe and supportive places of learning: a supportive learning community; systematic approaches to supporting safety and positive behavior; involvement of family, students, school staff, and the surrounding community; and standards and measures to support continuous improvement based on data. Fully engaging the entire school community is essential to creating and maintaining schools where students feel respected, safe, and supported. State and district standards should be set that identify communities' goals and vision of safe and supportive learning communities. Promoting and providing professional development for all school staff ensures that state professional standards are adhered. Creating and maintaining safe and supporting learning communities requires attention to social relations, physical setting, supports and services, and resources. Continued research of the four core elements, and development and field-testing of standards and measures for monitoring can be translated into forms usable by all who want to improve their schools. (Contains 119 references.) (RT)

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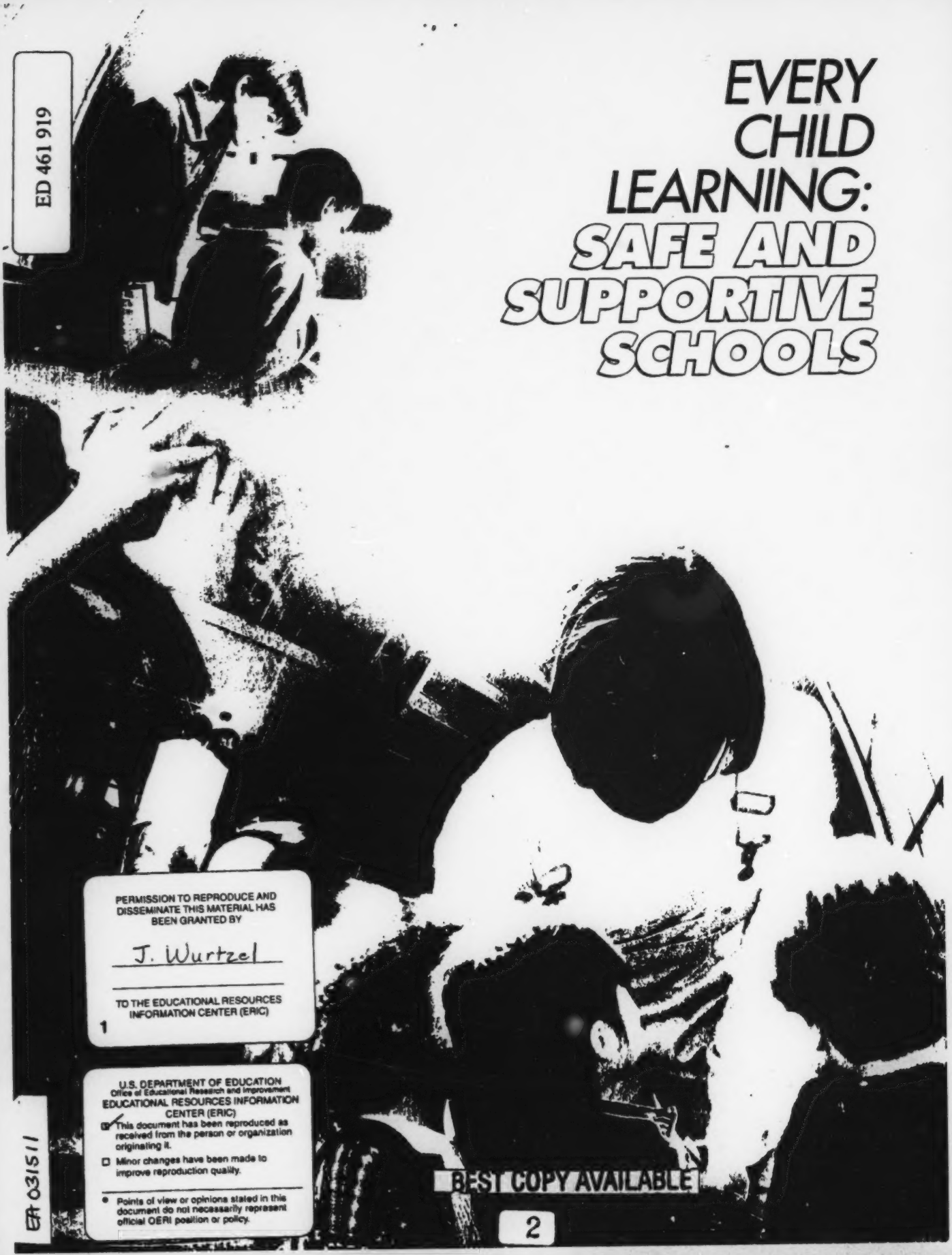

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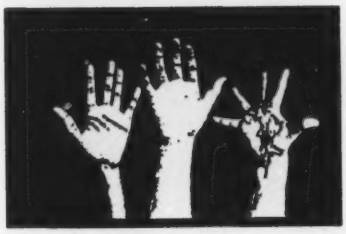

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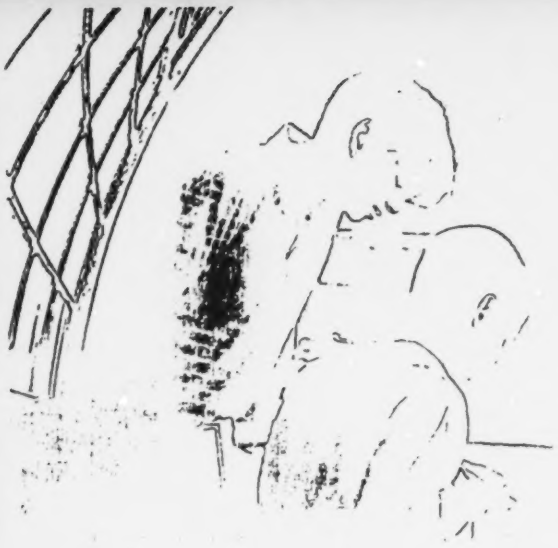

EVERY CHILD LEARNING: SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

Learning First Alliance

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Foreword

This guide to safe and supportive schools has been adopted by the Learning First Alliance, an organization of 12 leading national education associations. It has been shaped by the leaders and staff of these 12 associations. In addition, we are pleased to acknowledge the assistance of Eric Schaps, President, Developmental Studies Center (Oakland, CA), and Daniel Solomon, Consultant in Social and Educational Research and Evaluation, in drafting the paper, as well as the advice provided by Howard Adelman, Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles; Marty Blank, Coalition for Community Schools/Institute for Educational Leadership; Bob Blum, Professor and Director of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Health, University of Minnesota; James P. Comer, M.D., Maurice Falk Professor of Child Psychiatry, Yale University Child Study Center; C. William Day, Senior Analyst, KBD Planning Group, Inc.; Jerome Freiberg, Moores University Professor of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, University of Houston; Denise Gottfredson, Professor, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Maryland at College Park; Ann Henderson, Consultant; David Hornbeck, Consultant; Rob Horner, Director of Educational and Community Supports, University of Oregon; Clea McNeely, Assistant Professor, Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Health, University of Minnesota; Oliver Moles, Education Research Analyst, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education; Nel Noddings, Lee L. Jacks Professor Emerita of Child Education, School of Education, Stanford University; Pedro Noguera, Professor of Education, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University; David Osher, Managing Research Scientist and Director, Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, American Institutes for Research; Karen Pittman, Executive Director, Forum for Youth Investment; Ronald Stephens, Executive Director, National School Safety Center; and Hill Walker, Director of Center on Human Development, College of Education, University of Oregon.

Although many individuals have offered suggestions that have been incorporated herein, this guide does not necessarily represent the views of any individual who assisted in the writing or provided advice and comment.

Introduction

Rationale

Imagine that it's the first day of the new school year. Picture the students as they approach their school that morning. Zero in on them as they walk toward the front doors and try to imagine what they are thinking and feeling.

Are they thinking, "Boy, I can't wait to pick up where we left off in history class last June to find out what happened after the Revolutionary War"? Or, "Now that I've mastered long division, I hope I get lots of chances to use it"? Or, "I know I can do better on the SAT-9 this year if I just buckle down"?

Probably not. More likely they're wondering, "Will I have friends this year? Will I know anyone in my class? Will my teachers like me? Will they care enough to try to help me? Will I be able to do the work? What if I can't?" And sadly, in more places than anyone would like, students may be worrying, "Will I be safe here? Will I be picked on or threatened or beaten up or ripped off?"

These questions—the ones that actually are on students' minds—reflect their basic, legitimate needs for physical and psychological safety; for a sense of belonging and connection to others; and for reassurance that they are capable, worthy people. As such, these questions constitute compelling evidence that our schools must be safe, supportive places.

Schools that satisfy students' basic needs benefit from students' improved attitudes and behavior. In addition to helping their students learn and grow—academically, socially, emotionally, and ethically—these schools also help the students avoid problems ranging from emotional distress to drug use to violence. Promoting academic achievement is of course an essential goal for schools, but outcomes in these other areas are also critical. The mission of our public schools historically has been—and still needs to be—to prepare students to be productive citizens, to cultivate moral character, and to promote an appreciation of the arts and culture. Emphasizing the importance of learning along with other qualities that are essential to our society, such as fairness, concern for others, and responsibility, helps promote a shared commitment to the school's goals, establishes common ground, and shapes the norms that govern daily interactions.

Most readers will not be surprised by the central assertion of this document: that schools which students experience as safe and supportive will be more success-

ful at promoting student achievement and developing such qualities as good character and citizenship. But as obvious and commonsensical as this priority on a safe and supportive learning community may be, it is sometimes slighted. For example, while the movement to raise academic standards has rightly focused the nation on improving student achievement, a narrow concentration on higher standards is, in some places, crowding out attention to the fundamental issues of safe and supportive learning communities.

Another mistake is to consider the creation of a safe and supportive school community as an add-on effort consisting of special programs to address specific topics such as bullying, character education, or dispute resolution. Unless the school has a clear sense of its vision and goals, along with a comprehensive plan to realize them, such programs will likely do little to positively affect the daily experience of most students and staff.

The Learning First Alliance advocates a comprehensive approach to safe and supportive learning communities as an essential component of effective school reform, and has set the creation of safe and supportive places of learning as one of its top priorities, equal with its priorities of high student achievement and effective family and community involvement.

Background

Just a century ago, the average public school enrolled only 40 students; the size of the average school *district* was only 120 students (U.S. Census Bureau, 1900). Safety was easier to ensure, and close, supportive relationships among teachers and students, parents and teachers, and among students themselves were easier to establish. At the same time, schools were more racially, ethnically and economically homogeneous, and society as a whole more ethnocentric; issues of intergroup tolerance, acceptance, and social harmony were evaded through segregation in the schools and neighborhoods.

Today, a typical elementary school enrolls more than 400 students and a high school more than 2,000 students. These students may come from varied cultures and backgrounds, many locales, and a variety of family configurations. As a result, schools must deliberately cultivate and artfully orchestrate a sense of connection, cohesion, and safety.

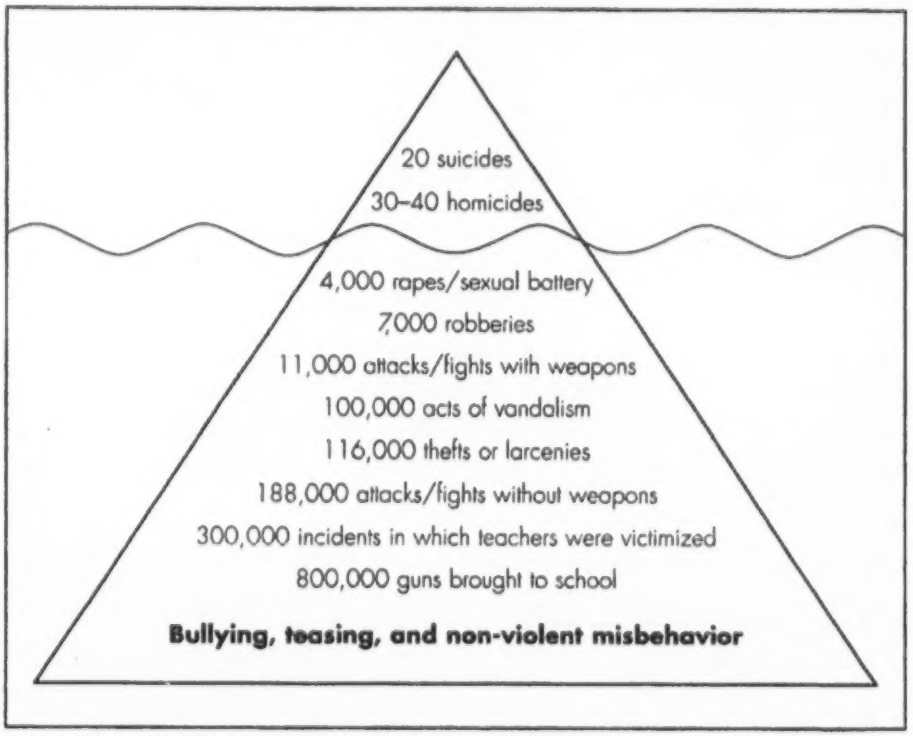
Despite the media attention, schools are one of the safest places for children to be. In fact, the incidence of violence in schools has actually been *decreasing* over the past decade. Ninety percent of all public schools reported no serious violent crimes in 1997 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). Still, educators, students, families, and communities must continue to strive to make schools safe from the horrific use of deadly weapons, as well as from fighting, bullying, vandalism, and other harmful behavior.

The multiple shootings at schools during the past few years are a major reason school safety has become a national issue. The roughly 20 student suicides and

30–40 school-related homicides each year also capture headlines. But in our schools in 1996–97 there were also 4,000 cases of rape or sexual battery, 7,000 robberies, 11,000 physical attacks or fights involving weapons, 100,000 acts of vandalism, 116,000 thefts or larcenies, 188,000 physical attacks or fights without weapons, 300,000 incidents in which teachers were victimized, and 800,000 guns brought to school (Burns et al., 1998).

These startling statistics do not reflect the uncounted millions of acts of bullying, teasing, and nonviolent misbehavior of every other hue. For example, 30 percent of students in grades 6–10 report being bullied, or victims of bullies, or both (Nansel et al., 2001). This type of misbehavior, vastly more common than any other, ruins the school day for many students. Being threatened, teased, or jostled in the hall inevitably causes students to feel anger, fear, frustration, and alienation. These feelings can erupt or simmer below the surface, but either way they distract students from learning and teachers from teaching. Nationwide, 27 percent of teachers say that student misbehavior keeps them from teaching "a fair amount to a great deal of the time" (Gottfredson et al., 2000).

School-Related Incidents (1996—1997)



Source: William Modzeleski, U.S. Department of Education.

Core Elements of Safe and Supportive Learning Communities

"Most of the teachers here really care about me. They help not just with the subjects they teach, but with other subjects and personal things. It is different than at other schools where they tell you to get your mind off anything that is not their subject."

—7th grade student

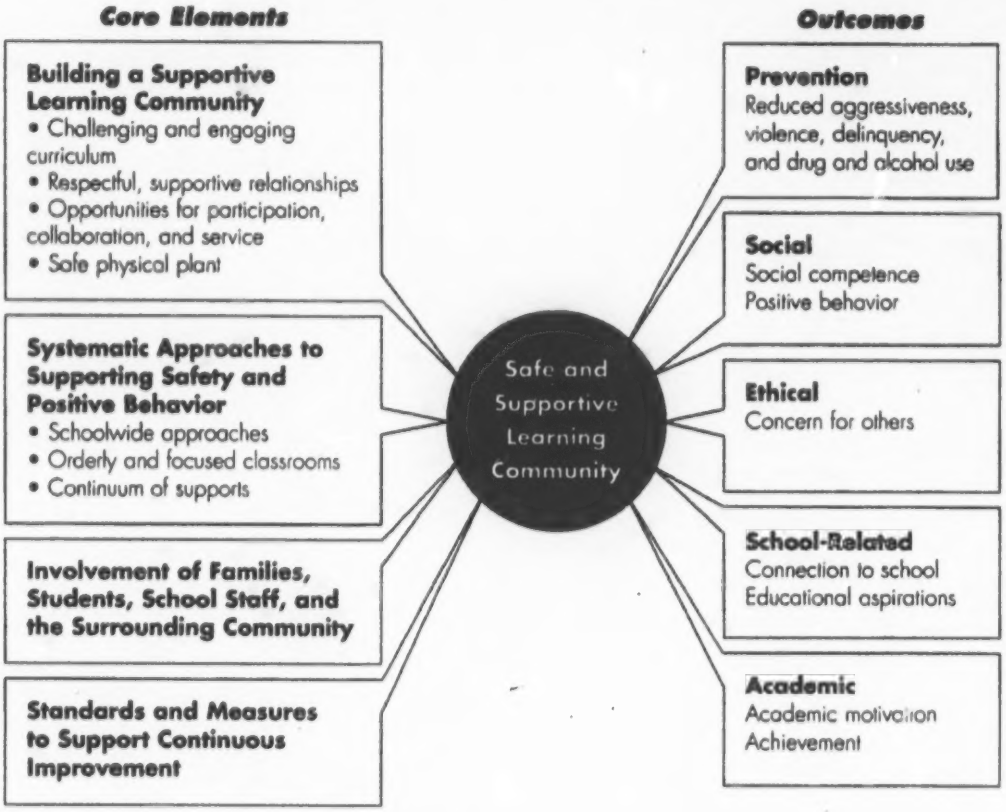
So what makes a school a place that students experience as safe and supportive? Four core elements are necessary to create and maintain schools as safe and supportive places of learning. We address these four core elements in this section; the following section presents recommended actions and policies for helping schools implement these core elements. The four core elements we identify are

- **A supportive learning community, including**
  - A challenging and engaging curriculum for all students;
  - Respectful, supportive relationships among and between students, school staff, and parents;
  - Frequent opportunities for student participation, collaboration, service, and self-direction; and
  - A physical plant that promotes safety and community.
- **Systematic approaches to supporting safety and positive behavior, including**
  - Schoolwide approaches to climate, safety, and discipline;
  - Orderly and focused classrooms; and
  - A continuum of supports for the few students who need them.
- **Involvement of family, students, school staff, and the surrounding community.**
- **Standards and measures to support continuous improvement based on data.**

Circumstances differ for students and schools in urban, rural, and suburban communities, in affluent and impoverished communities, and even among the students and schools within each community. In addition, developmental needs of

students vary greatly from elementary to middle to high school. However, *research suggests that these four core elements—and the subtopics for each—are relevant to all schools and all communities.* Schools and communities should apply each element according to their own unique circumstances. Attention to our fourth element, using data to support continuous improvement, is therefore vital.

Core Elements and Outcomes of Safe and Supportive Learning Communities



The central theme of this action plan is that every school must make the creation of a *safe and supportive learning community* one of its highest priorities. Each component of this phrase—*safe*, *supportive*, *learning*, *community*—is critical. Schools may be safe and orderly, but if they fail to build a supportive community and press for high academic expectations, students learn little. Similarly, schools may be warm and supportive, but if they have low expectations for their students, little learning takes place.

Why is a safe and supportive learning community so powerful? Because it fulfills students' basic psychological needs for belonging, autonomy, influence, competence, and physical security. As those basic needs are met, *because* they are being

met, students tend to become increasingly committed to the school community's norms, rules, and values. As students subscribe more deeply to these constructive norms, their behavior changes accordingly, which in turn creates an upward spiral that benefits everyone.

The following core elements are central to achieving this vision of safe and supportive learning communities for all students.

Core Element 1: A Supportive Learning Community

The idea that safety is an essential element of an effective school is usually readily accepted. However, this notion of a supportive community may strike some as a bit warm and fuzzy, a little "soft," perhaps even suspicious for fear that it might divert attention from more important considerations such as academic rigor. But in fact, the creation of a supportive school community has proven to be remarkably powerful, wide-ranging, and enduring in its benefits.

The objective of creating a supportive learning community ought to be that *everyone* involved—staff, parents, and especially students—feels a strong sense of belonging in school, being concerned about one another's welfare, making significant contributions, having opportunities for ongoing learning and growth, and holding important goals and values in common with others. Students must be central in the effort to build the school community because students themselves—their relations with each other and with adults in the school—are key to their motivation, attitudes, and interpersonal behavior, and are the single greatest influence on school climate. Adults should share responsibility with students for creating and maintaining a supportive school environment. When we encourage and help students to be active contributors to the school climate, they usually live up to the trust and confidence we place in them.

Supporting evidence. The effects of strengthening students' sense of community are far-ranging. The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a study of 90,000 middle and high school students, found that students who feel "connected" to school—measured by the strength and quality of their relationships with teachers and other students—are more likely to have improved attitudes toward school, learning, and teachers; heightened academic aspirations, motivation, and achievement; and more positive social attitudes, values, and behavior. In addition, when students feel "connected" to school, they are less likely to use drugs, be violent, commit suicide, or exhibit other at-risk behaviors (Resnick et al., 1997). Others have presented similar findings (Verdugo & Schneider, 1999; Gottfredson, 2001).

Additional research shows that students' sense of school as community is related to a number of improved student outcomes. These include reduced drug use, victimization, and delinquency, as well as increased positive interpersonal attitudes, enjoyment of school, school engagement, and academic motivation (Battistich & Hom, 1997; Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000, on research by Developmental Studies Center); reduced delinquency, drug use, misbehavior, violence, and sexual activity (O'Donnell, Hawkins, Catalano, Abbot, & Day, 1995, on research by the Seattle Social Development Project); and improved school climate, reading and math achievement, behavior, and anger control (Cook, Murphy, & Hunt, 2000, on implementation of the Comer School Development Program). Students with a sense of community tend to abide by the classroom's expressed norms and values (Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps, & Delucchi, 1992).

When coupled with a consistent emphasis on academic performance ("academic press"), a strong sense of community boosts academic achievement (Shouse, 1996; Lee & Smith, 1999). While the research evidence indicates that the communal organization of schools, or a sense among students of the school as a community, has generally positive effects for achievement and various other student outcomes, there is also evidence that these effects may be most pronounced for the most at-risk students (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995; Shouse, 1996).

Substantial theoretical and empirical evidence supports the existence of basic human psychological needs for autonomy, belonging, competence, and physical security (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Pittman & Wright, 1991; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

A challenging and engaging curriculum for all students.

Students are most motivated to learn, feel the greatest sense of accomplishment, and achieve at the highest levels when they are able to succeed at tasks that spark their interest and stretch their capacities. To be meaningful, learning must effectively connect to students' questions, concerns, and personal experiences, thereby capturing their intrinsic motivation and making the value of what they learn readily apparent to them. Guiding students to think about their academic work in relation to the challenges of daily life helps them develop a deeper understanding of their academic value and the myriad ways work skills can be applied. When students find purpose in their learning, and when they feel challenged and successful much of the time, they become more involved in their own learning and

more invested in, and attached to, the school community. Conversely, when students see little meaning in what they are asked to learn, or when they find that learning tasks are consistently too easy or too difficult, they lose interest, "tune out," and become disruptive.

Schools that provide a challenging and engaging curriculum for all students generally are organized around students and their work and place a strong and consistent emphasis on high academic achievement. Staff in these schools articulate and emphasize these high expectations in many ways, such as by showing interest in intellectual issues and problems, expressing their high expectations for students, encouraging and taking an interest in student performance, sharing and exhibiting the work of all students, and providing constructive feedback to students about their performance and efforts. Moreover, teachers hold high expectations for all students, not just those considered "gifted" or "college material." No student is identified as unable to succeed or warehoused in dead-end classes.

All schools should put in place a robust curriculum that emphasizes both the basics and higher levels of thinking. Recognizing that students learn in many ways, teachers should use an appropriate mix of lecture, small-group work and problem solving, hands-on activities, and extended, in-depth inquiry. Teachers should regularly expect students to analyze and synthesize complex ideas and materials in classroom discussion and writing. Schools can maintain student engagement in learning not only by providing consistently challenging tasks, but also by promoting student self-direction and providing clear explanations of the purpose of learning activities and their interconnections.

Finally, effective schools generally involve staff, parents, and students in developing, understanding, and supporting academic standards and the school's curriculum. Emphasizing the importance of learning in the wider school community creates a common ground among students, families, and staff; promotes shared commitment; and shapes norms that govern daily interactions.

Supporting evidence. A wealth of research has shown that optimal challenge leads to maximum motivation and engagement (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Harter, 1978; Heinzen, 1989; Paris & Turner, 1994; Turner, Parkes, Cox, & Meyer, 1995). Student engagement and enthusiasm are critical to student achievement, school attendance, and staying in school (Finn, 1989, 1992). However, it is essential to couple community building with a consistent emphasis on academic press to increase student achievement (Lee & Smith, 1999; Shouse, 1996).

An emerging body of research shows that increased student achievement is found in schools and classrooms with high expectations, a challenging curriculum, and instruction that focuses on the development of both thinking skills and content understanding (Schlecty, 1997; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Effective instruction engages students in higher levels of thinking; uses multiple ways of working with students, such as lectures, small groups, and independent projects; and connects schoolwork to real-life contexts

"In a lot of high schools there's an entire authoritarian structure. Students are not people; they're babysitting charges. You don't get looked at; you don't get respected. People glare at you. There are security guards. . . . They carry guns. It scares me. I'm not afraid of being physically harmed. But that's not a safe [environment] for the person that I want to become and the things that I want to do."

—Sarah,
high school student

5

LEARNING FIRST ALLIANCE

(Stigler & Heibert, 1999; Newmann & Whelage, 1995; Brown, 1997; Knapp & Associates, 1995). Research also suggests that increased student learning is best achieved where the school and community have clear goals to help all students meet high standards and teachers, administrators, students, and families take collective responsibility for meeting those goals (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Stigler & Heibert, 1999; Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999).

Failure to support the academic achievement of students is related to students' disengagement from school and increased risk-taking behavior. National longitudinal data show that regardless of ethnic background or social class, youth who have problems with schoolwork are more likely than others to be involved in every health risk studied, including alcohol, sexual intercourse, and weapon-related violence (Blum, Beuhring, & Rinehard, 2000).

Respectful, supportive relationships among and between students, school staff, and parents.

We learn best from those with whom we are in caring, mutually respectful relationships that promote independence. Such supportive relationships enable students from diverse backgrounds to feel comfortable bringing their personal experiences into the classroom, discover their common humanity, and feel as though they are viewed as assets to the school community.

Supportive relationships help parents—especially those who otherwise would feel vulnerable or ill at ease—to take active roles in the school and in their children's education. Parents should feel valued and welcome in the school, as their participation helps create and maintain the sense of community in the school. Students are more committed to the school's goals when they see close collaboration between their parents and the school.

Similarly, supportive relationships among educators tend to improve their teaching skills, enhance their sense of collegiality and collective responsibility, and heighten their satisfaction with teaching. When teachers work together, they learn more about professional issues, instructional approaches, and the content of their lessons. By working together in planning and assessment, they create continuity for themselves and their students. Collaboration among faculty enriches both technical and social resources and ultimately leads to more effective teaching.

Two important structural foundations for facilitating supportive relationships—and thus safe and supportive learning communities—are smaller schools and smaller class sizes. In smaller schools, students and staff know each other well, making it easier to promote student engagement, supportive relationships, respect for others, and opportunities for challenge, service, and participation.

Smaller schools experience lower rates of fighting and disruptive behavior and improved rates of attendance; graduation; participation in extracurricular activities; student, teacher, and parent satisfaction; and, often, academic achievement, particularly among students from low-income and minority backgrounds.

While there is no precise answer to the question "How small is small enough?" research suggests that 300–400 students is an effective size for elementary schools, as is 600–900 for secondary schools. Existing larger schools can be divided into smaller learning communities called schools-within-schools, which can include specialty academies, houses, and alternative schools. When schools-within-schools are autonomous and have a distinct program, staff, students, and space, they can produce the same levels of support and connectedness and provide many of the same benefits as stand-alone smaller schools.

Smaller class size, particularly classes of 20 students or fewer in the early grades, also lays a foundation for safe and supportive learning communities. In smaller classes, there are generally fewer discipline problems, higher levels of student participation, heightened enthusiasm, and improved morale among students and teachers. Teachers are also better able to form a relationship with each child's family. When smaller classes are coupled with individualized instruction and other teaching strategies that are more easily implemented in smaller classrooms, the result is often increased student achievement.

Regardless of school and class size, schools can take deliberate steps to build respectful and supportive relationships within and across classes, among students and staff, among parents and staff, and among school staff. Schools can help students feel more personally connected and supported by ensuring that they are known well by one or more of their teachers and other adults in the school. At least one school staff member should know, without looking at a file, whether the student is thriving or struggling, who

her friends are, whether her parents support her learning, and whether she is involved in safe and productive activities outside of school hours. This student-adult relationship can be promoted in many ways, including student advisory systems, team teaching, and looping (keeping students with the same teacher or teachers for more than one year). These practices facilitate the development of close adult-student relationships, but they do not ensure them. Staff must take time to learn about and listen to students—about their personal lives, their experiences at school, their hopes, disappointments, and concerns—and also to let students get to know them as people.

Some educators may need help learning how to relate to students in this way. Many educators may need help understanding their ethical and legal responsibilities when communicating with students about personal and sensitive issues. They may, for instance, need instruction on making referrals to health and social service agencies, or information about laws governing the kinds of student disclosures that must be reported to health or safety agencies.

To promote supportive relationships among students, schools can provide opportunities for them to learn about and understand people from different cultures and backgrounds. Activities might include lessons that teach about diverse cultures; presentations during which students from different cultures describe their histories, traditions, and experiences; and opportunities for students from different backgrounds to participate together in academic or nonacademic activities. Teachers can emphasize these values of compassion through character education; by expressing and demonstrating their own concern for others; and by encouraging parents to support and reinforce classroom discussions, activities, and projects related to interpersonal or intergroup issues. Students themselves can strengthen these values by participating in service learning projects designed to help others, reading and discussing literature that deals with interpersonal or intergroup problems or issues, and engaging in class discussions and problem solving around interpersonal issues and conflicts.

Students often remember how adults behave more than what they say. School staff should model these values and behaviors, emphasize them in daily interactions, and discuss them explicitly and directly.

To strengthen relationships among staff, schools should create conditions in which teachers and other staff members feel a part of a cohesive professional community. These conditions can be achieved by providing teachers with opportunities to influence school goals and directions, collaborate with each other and develop mutually helpful relationships, and enhance their expertise through ongoing staff development.

In schools that foster close relationships, respect for others, and clear avenues of communication, students and others in the school community are more likely to feel comfortable voicing concerns—whether about their own experiences at school or home or about the behavior or needs of other students.

Supporting evidence. Many studies substantiate the importance of belonging and support for students (Goodenow, 1993a, 1993b; Resnick et al., 1997; Wentzel, 1997; Werner & Smith, 1989; McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994; see also Institute for Education in Transformation, 1992).

Research shows that teacher satisfaction and effectiveness is related to their sense of the school as a community (McLaughlin, 1993; Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Lee, Dedrick, & Smith, 1991). Research on the separate components of teachers' sense of community has verified the importance of teacher collaboration (Lee, Bryk, & Smith, 1993), teacher influence on school decisions (Smylie, 1994), and commonality of teacher goals (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988; Rosenholtz, 1989).

There is also evidence that teachers who themselves experience the school as a community try to provide parallel experiences for their students: "When teachers are active participants in professional learning communities with a strong sense of voice and authority, they create a similar learning context for their students" (Becker & Riel, 1999).

Evidence shows that small schools help promote positive administrator and teacher attitudes and collaboration. Among students, they contribute to positive interpersonal relations, attitudes, and behavior; a greater sense of belonging; participation in extracurricular activities; enhanced school attendance; and lowered dropout rates (Wasley, 2000; Cotton, 1998). According to Lee and Smith (1997), achievement was highest in schools of 600–900 students and was most equally distributed (across SES groups) in very small schools. The study also found that the effects of school size on learning were greatest in schools with many low SES or minority students. In a comparison of large (over 1500) and small (under 500) schools, Lee, Smerdon, Alfeld, and Brown (2000) found that there was more support and caring in the small schools (although some students felt there was too much closeness), and that while small schools had a more limited curriculum, they offered more personalized counseling and guidance of students.

A review of the research on class size by the U.S. Department of Education (1999) concludes that reduced class size has positive effects on achievement in the early grades, with effects beginning to appear when class size is reduced to 15–20 and increasing with further reductions; that the positive effects are greater for disadvantaged and minority students than for others; and that it improves the quality of classroom activity. The review cites changes directly attributable to the smaller sizes that may help explain the achievement gains: a better classroom atmosphere, more opportunity for individual attention, more flexibility for teachers, more space, fewer distractions, more time for each student to speak, less noise, a friendlier atmosphere with better student-student and student-teacher relations, and increased student engagement.

Although only a few studies of looping—i.e., keeping students with the same teacher for more than one year—have been reported, their findings include increased student achievement; a more positive student attitude toward school; and, on the teacher's part, a more positive approach to classroom management (Yang, 1999; Burke, 1997).

"Now when I have problems with kids, I pull in the family, pull in the whole community, and ask, 'How can we help this child learn these skills?' Instead of, 'This child is being bad,' I ask, 'How can we help this child be successful and feel [a sense of] belonging to this group?'"

—Elementary school teacher

Frequent opportunities for student participation, collaboration, service, and self-direction.

In safe and supportive learning communities, the values of respect, cooperation, responsibility, leadership, helpfulness, and obligation to others are integral to the daily school routine and are taught and reinforced in a variety of ways. Frequent opportunities to collaborate and to reflect on their interactions with others allow students to learn such cooperative skills as listening carefully, disagreeing respectfully, and compromising, as well as to develop wider and richer networks of interpersonal relationships.

Moreover, by taking responsibility individually and in groups, students can experience the many benefits of making individual contributions to the well-being of the school and of participating on productive collaborative teams. Routine involvement in service activities, both in the school and in the wider community, can help students develop both long-lasting cooperative dispositions and a sense of contributing in progressively larger venues. In addition, character education can deepen these values.

When student learning is coupled with opportunities for self-direction and influence, these principles are further reinforced. Students are often an untapped resource in schools—the passive objects of reform rather than active forces in shaping and improving the school community. A degree of choice as to how one goes about one's own learning, along with some voice in shaping the goals, norms, and activities at school, is intrinsically rewarding and affirming. Having "voice and choice," in turn, strengthens students' bonds and commitment to the school community. By helping to define the school's goals and plan its activities, students see the school as "theirs"—and prepare for the demanding role of productive citizenship in our democracy.

The benefits and lessons of participation, collaboration, service to others, and self-direction can be learned only through experience. Educators should provide structured as well as informal opportunities for students to collaborate with each other in academic and nonacademic activities. Educators can nurture collaboration across classrooms through activities in which students from different classes work, play, or take field trips together, and through schoolwide activities that celebrate the accomplishments of the school as a whole. Schools should provide an array of opportunities for service, including ongoing individual activities, periodic collaborations among students on school projects, and community service projects.

Schools can foster students' emerging capacities for self-direction and influence by encouraging them to participate in classroom and school goal setting and decision making. Student participation in school governance is one traditional method of engaging students. Class meetings also enable students to shape the goals and ground rules of the classroom, and to help identify and address problems as they arise. Student advisory committees can draw on students from every grade so that older students are in close, regular contact with younger ones and are able to advise them. Older students may also be paired one-on-one with younger students as mentors or "buddies."

Opportunities for student participation, collaboration, service, and self-direction should be available not only during the academic day, but also in after-school and extracurricular activities such as sports, student clubs, and publications. Students who participate in structured activities in their nonschool hours are less likely to engage in negative and risky behavior. Moreover, after-school hours can be a time when students experience emotional, social, and academic growth; improved physical skills; and enhanced connections to caring adults, school, and other meaningful community institutions such as youth centers and faith-based organizations. Extracurricular and after-school activities should be designed to promote high levels of participation from all students, regardless of skill level (e.g., do not limit sports teams and orchestras to the most talented students).

Finally, paying continuous attention to the hopes, concerns, desires, and fears of students is essential for engaging them. Staff members must make this a part of their daily interactions with each student. In addition, school district and state administrators and policymakers should establish formal mechanisms for hearing student views.

Supporting evidence. Autonomy, self-direction, and influence are important to students, according to a variety of studies (deCharms, 1976, 1984; Pittman & Wright, 1991; Ryan & Grolnick, 1984; Ryan, Connell, & Deci, 1985; Solomon et al., 1996; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989).

Johnson and Johnson (1989), Sharan (1990), and Slavin (1990) show that cooperative learning promotes students' enjoyment of school and interpersonal relations, development of social skills, sense of the classroom as a community, and academic achievement.

Experimental (Staub, 1975) and cross-cultural (Whiting & Whiting, 1975) research show that participating in helpful activities or being given responsibility to perform a helpful role for extended periods of time can promote individual dispositions to be helpful to others. Staub (1979) describes this process as "natural socialization," in that subjects do not learn a desired behavior directly from socializing agents, but rather by participating in the activity.

These principles have been applied to education through community service programs, particularly in high schools. A recent research review suggests that positive findings are converging with respect to improved personal and social development, social and interpersonal development, a sense of social and civic responsibility, academic progress, career exploration and aspirations, school climate and youth-community relations, and decreased risk-taking behaviors. According to Billing (2000), programs appear to be most effective when they involve high levels of student responsibility, autonomy and choice, direct contact with service recipients, reflection activities, and well-prepared teachers.

Research shows that students who participate in extracurricular activities have better attendance, lower dropout rates, lower rates of drug use, higher academic achievement, and higher aspirations than nonparticipants, presumably because such participation reflects and enhances student connection with and attachment to the school (Brown & Theobald, 1998; Camp, 1990; Jenkins, 1996; Gerber, 1996; Mahoney, 2000; Nettles, Mucherah, & Jones, 2000; National Center for Education Statistics, 1995; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1995).

A physical plant that promotes safety and community.

While a safe and supportive learning community can be created in a dilapidated, poorly designed school, creating an environment in which students thrive is more easily accomplished in a physical plant that promotes safety and community. Unfortunately, three in four U.S. schools need some kind of repair. About one-third of all schools—serving 14 million students—need extensive repair or replacement. More than 11 million students attend schools that lack proper ventilation and other environmental controls. In addition, more than 20 percent of all public school students attend overcrowded classrooms (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1996; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999).

Students can read the message on the walls. When their school has peeling paint, clogged toilets, a leaky roof, dark hallways, littered playgrounds, and poor air quality, the message is that these students and their education are not respected or valued. This concrete evidence of disregard undermines efforts to create a respectful and caring school community.

The poor condition of many school buildings also has a demonstrable effect on student health, which can in turn affect achievement. Toxic physical conditions such as poor ventilation, environmental contaminants, and lack of daylight harm students' health and hinder their learning.

When designing new schools and evaluating or renovating existing schools,

safety, community, and learning should be considered together. Building design and security technology can either support or undermine the school's vision and goals. Thus, communities should consider their goals comprehensively and identify designs that promote both learning and safety. For example, cooperative learning, team teaching, student advisories, and after-school activities each have distinctive space and design needs.

It *is* possible to design schools that are safe and also feel like places of learning rather than prisons. As communities make decisions about new construction and renovation, one of the key design issues they must consider is size. We have already stressed the importance of smaller schools, which not only promote learning and community, but also are safer. Other critical design issues include natural surveillance, traffic flow, and classroom placement.

The more easily adults and students can see what is happening on school grounds, the easier it is to ensure safety. Windows, clear sightlines within the building and to outside grounds, and good lighting are important. Avoid blind spots, secluded areas, and out-of-the-way bathrooms. Locating the offices at school entrances increases natural surveillance. Traffic flow also affects safety, so halls and stairs should be wide to reduce jostling and friction, and access to the school campus should be limited. Placing classrooms for younger students in a separate area of the school can ensure better supervision and create a sense of community; examples of this are 6th and 9th grade "houses," which create a special area for students entering middle or high school.

Technology such as surveillance cameras, door alarms, and access control can supplement building design and help compensate for design flaws in older buildings. So long as guns are readily available to our children—800,000 guns are brought to school each year, according to the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice (2000)—the need for metal detectors at some schools will continue.

Investing in physical plant and safety-related technology is an enormous commitment with long-term consequences. States and districts play an important role in providing information, policies, and support for effective facilities planning. However, building design and hardware alone cannot ensure safety, build community, or improve learning. We achieve those goals only by paying attention to the other core elements addressed in this paper.

Supporting evidence. A growing body of evidence shows that the physical environment, including ventilation, day lighting, and indoor environmental contaminants, can have a profound effect on the health of children and on their ability to learn efficiently (Loisos, 1999; Daisey & Angell, 1998).

Schneider, Walker, and Sprague (2000) and the National School Boards Association (1996) synthesize research-based guidance on safe school design.

"I've realized that we fail to give children their due. At 9:15 on the first day of school this year I asked children in my first class what they wanted their norms to be for treating each other. At 9:15 on that first day of school they talked about wanting to be kind, responsible, honest, like a family."

—Elementary school teacher

Core Element 2: Systematic Approaches to Supporting Safety and Positive Behavior

On average, 80 percent of a school's students come to school able to learn, conform to rules, and follow ordinary social conventions. Another 15 percent, on average, are able to fit in and succeed with modest additional assistance, such as conflict resolution or emotion-management training. The remaining 5 percent or so engage in severe and chronic problem behaviors and need more intensive and ongoing help, such as regular individual counseling or placement in alternative programs that provide greater supervision, structure, and support.

In light of these realities, safe and supportive schools develop comprehensive and systematic plans for promoting positive student behavior, including both general measures for all students and graduated or tailored services to meet the needs of small groups and individual students. Some of these measures are initiated schoolwide or in the classroom; others are offered one-on-one or to small groups. The goal, of course, is to offer a range of supports that help all students become good and contributing citizens of their school community.

Schoolwide approaches to improving school climate, safety, and discipline.

One basic way to improve school climate, safety, and discipline is to communicate a clear, simple, positive message about what students must do to be successful, contributing members of the school. The message can be as simple as "Be respectful, be safe, be kind," or "Respect yourself, respect others, respect property." Rules that support this message need to be few in number so they can be easily remembered, should be concisely stated, and should include a clear rationale with clear consequences for violations. The rules should be revisited and revised as needed. Such a discipline code helps create common ground as well as a basis for dealing consistently and fairly with transgressions when they occur. These rules do not apply to students alone. Staff members have a reciprocal obligation to abide by school rules such as "Be respectful," "Be fair," and "Be on time."

In every part of the school—classroom, cafeteria, hallways, playground—and throughout every part of the school day—including recess and extracurricular activities—it is important to create an atmosphere in which civility, order, and decorum are the norms and antisocial behavior such as bullying, intimidation, and taunting are clearly unacceptable. School staff must model and reinforce norms and rules, helping students understand what they mean in terms of concrete behaviors. This emphasis on rules and norms is particularly important at the beginning of the school year, when staff and students can focus systematically on identifying common behavioral problems and helping students identify appropriate alternative behaviors. Staff then can help students display and encourage positive behavior throughout the school year.

Rules must also be fairly and consistently enforced according to clearly communicated guidelines and without regard to the class, race, gender, or other demographic characteristics of students. Students need opportunities to learn from and correct mistakes. Punishment for violations should be delivered in the context of a clearly articulated educational message.

To enhance the effectiveness of discipline policies and procedures, a consistent schoolwide system must be in place to support individual staff efforts. School administrators must have a consistent vision and exhibit through their actions their support and reinforcement of teachers' discipline practices.

Students and families should play a central role in determining school rules and how they are communicated and enforced. Schools should solicit input from representative parents when formulating school rules and then provide all parents with a clear explanation of the rules—including associated rewards and penalties—along with the process for working with school staff when discipline problems arise. Students should also have opportunities to help determine, discuss, suggest changes to, and enforce rules during the school year.

Another essential element of an orderly and focused school environment is the opportunity for all students to learn and practice sound decision making and positive approaches for getting along with others. While schools often teach skills such as anger management and conflict resolution and values such as tolerance through a short-term, focused curriculum unit or supplemental activity, it is even more important, as we stressed earlier, to incorporate desired skills and values into the daily life of the entire school, including pedagogical approaches to instruction, service learning, the discipline code, and classroom management.

Finally, an effective schoolwide approach includes systems for introducing new students into the norms and culture of the school. All schools—particularly schools with highly mobile populations—should have programs and practices that support new students who transfer into the school. In addition, middle and high schools need solid transition practices that ease the entry of every new group of students into their larger, more complex, and more demanding learning environments. Asking older students to take significant responsibility in the orientation process for incoming students is an obvious opportunity for students to play an active and important role in transmitting the school's culture and facilitating the adjustment of new students.

Supporting evidence. Research suggests that on average, 80 percent of children respond to good schoolwide programs, 15 percent need some additional behavior support, and up to 5 percent need intensive help or alternative placement programs (Sugai, Horner, & Gresham, 2001).

Two comprehensive reviews of systemic approaches to supporting safety and positive behavior are *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools* (1998) from the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice and *Strategies that Work* (2000a) by Richard Verdugo.

Gottfredson (2001) lists the following models or approaches derived from programs that have shown evidence of effectiveness:

- Setting rules, communicating clear expectations for behavior, consistently enforcing rules, and providing rewards for rule compliance and punishments for rule infractions.
- Organizing the delivery of instruction in ways that promote maximum learning and that encourage a sense of community.
- Improving general management functions such as coordination, resource allocation, and communication, and establishing and maintaining clear goals for the organization.
- Increasing social control through an extended network of caring adults who interact regularly with the students and who share norms and expectations about their students (communal social organizations).
- Providing behavior management interventions.
- Providing instruction, training, and coaching in the development of social competency skills for the general population.
- Providing instruction, training, and coaching in the development of social competency skills for high-risk populations.

Similarly, separate research suggests that comprehensive approaches to school discipline emphasize teaching appropriate behavior (not just punishing), matching the level of intervention to the level of behavioral challenge posed by each student, and designing integrated systems that deal with a full range of discipline challenges (Sugai, Horner, & Gresham, 2001).

Derzon and Wilson (1999) found evidence that three general types of programs reduced youth antisocial behavior: programs focusing on *anger control*, those emphasizing *administrative techniques* (including classroom management, schoolwide norms and rules, school organization, etc.), and those providing *social skills training*.

Many of the school discipline programs that have been developed are "packaged" and many are "home-grown." A recent nationwide survey found that the quality of implementation varies greatly, with home-grown programs, on the whole, somewhat more consistently implemented than the packaged programs (Gottfredson et al., 2000). Research on programs emphasizing schoolwide conflict resolution, peer mediation, and direct teaching of social skills and self-management strategies has shown positive effects (U.S. Department of Education, 2000b; Johnson & Johnson, 1996). In addition, a number of programs have successfully incorporated "pro-social" emphases and training as part of the basic school curriculum, including the Child Development Project (Solomon et al., 2000; Battistich et al., 2000), the Social Development Project (Hawkins et al., 1999), and the Responsive Classroom (Wood, 1994). Each of these showed positive effects on indicators of students' social skills and problem behaviors.

Many researchers have documented the difficulties associated with the transition to secondary schools, particularly junior high schools. Studies have shown that the transition from elementary schools to the restrictive and impersonal environments of many middle schools and junior high schools has negative effects on student achievement (Alspaugh, 1998), motivation and feelings of competence (Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992; Wigfield & Eccles, 1994), and self-esteem (Wigfield & Eccles, 1994).

School staff can ease these transitions by meeting students before they enter the secondary school, organizing visits to the new school for student and families before the school year begins, and establishing buddy systems that pair a new student with an "upper classman." Other programs that have shown some success include interdisciplinary teaming (Alspaugh & Harting, 1997), "schools-within-schools," small, stable groups of students for homework and academic subjects, and teacher roles that include counseling and guidance (Felner, Brand, Adan, & Mulhall, 1993).

"All my teachers show respect to all of the students in the classes, and so we show respect to them."

—7th grade student

Orderly and focused classrooms.

Creating orderly and focused classrooms is a key element in improving student achievement and developing student competencies. Creating such classrooms is best achieved by actively nurturing students' emerging ability to manage themselves. Classroom teachers support the growth of self-management by developing and explicitly teaching clear routines and behavioral expectations, including students as participants in the management of the class, and celebrating the success of students who meet behavioral expectations.

At the beginning of the school year, teachers who are expert in effective classroom management take time to develop specific classroom routines and rules, including routines for taking attendance, setting schedules, dealing with visitors, and distributing papers. They also establish student routines for starting and ending work, asking questions, and going to the restroom, and tend to the arrangements of the physical environment, such as classroom seating and traffic patterns.

These classroom rules should build on and be consistent with school rules. In addition to developing daily routines and rules, teachers need to decide how they will handle less frequent, more extreme misbehavior. Clear rules must be coupled with clear and consistent consequences for violating those rules. Students should be able to anticipate and understand the consequences of breaking the rules; thus, teachers should never ignore inappropriate behavior. Students—particularly older students—can and should help develop classroom rules and consequences for violations.

Although identifying and imposing consequences for misbehavior is an essential element of effective classroom management, students' classroom experiences should be as positive and supportive as possible. Harsh and punitive discipline styles tend to elicit student resentment and resistance and damage relationships, whereas those styles that include careful explanation of the reasons for rules, consider the sources of behavior problems, and engage students in solving problems

can foster relationships and maintain and enhance the sense of community in the classroom and school. Excessive punishment focuses the child on the punishment itself and ways to escape it, rather than on recognizing the behavior that evoked the punishment and understanding why the behavior was inappropriate or harmful. Whenever possible, teachers and other staff should focus on recognizing, celebrating, and rewarding appropriate behavior.

Supporting evidence. The Los Angeles County Office of Education (2000), U.S. Department of Education (2000), and Sugai, Horner, & Gresham (2001) synthesize the research and provide guidance on effective classroom management strategies.

Research suggests that effective classroom management can improve student learning by increasing time devoted to instruction (as opposed to discipline), decreasing discipline referrals, promoting more active teaching strategies, and improving classroom climate (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993; Opuni, 1998; Freiberg, Connell, & Lorentz, 2001.)

A continuum of supports for the few students who need them.

Most students thrive in schools that offer a strong curriculum, a supportive climate, a clear and consistently applied discipline code, and basic safety measures. But as mentioned earlier, roughly 15 percent of students need moderate levels of extra support and an additional 5 percent or so may need intensive help or alternative placement programs. All schools should have in place mechanisms for early identification, quick and appropriate early interventions, and intensive interventions for troubled or violent students. Moreover, schools should continually monitor the effectiveness of these interventions.

Schools should offer a range of services for improving the behavior of students who consistently and significantly misbehave. Central to these services are long-term, comprehensive, well-structured programs that teach expected behaviors, recognize and reward good behavior, and, as needed, administer consequences for misbehavior. These programs may teach anger management, conflict resolution, social problem solving, or decision-making skills, and may also provide counseling services to students and their families. To the degree possible, parents and students should be enlisted as active participants in a process of correcting and changing behavior, and programs should help parents learn how to help their children develop pro-social attitudes, values, and skills.

In some severe cases, providing targeted supports is insufficient and placement in an alternative setting within the school or in a separate alternative school is necessary to enable more intensive interventions for the misbehaving student and to preserve the learning environment for other students.

To preserve school safety and order, students who bring lethal weapons or illegal drugs to school, or who commit serious, violent assaults against others, should be

suspended or expelled. Schools rules should clearly delineate the behaviors that will lead to suspension or expulsion. The entire school community should be aware of these rules, and they should be enforced fairly.

It is up to individual states, districts, and schools to determine the length of a student's suspension for specific offenses, as well as the kinds of academic and intervention services offered to students during this period. However, no student should be suspended or expelled to the streets. States and districts should provide a continuum of quality short-, medium-, and long-term alternative settings in which chronically disruptive or violent students can be placed. These should run the gamut from in-school suspension rooms where unruly students can be sent to calm down to long-term facilities for troubled youth operated in close conjunction with mental health and social service providers.

Effective alternative programs include positive behavioral supports, caring staff, mental health services, active family involvement, and the involvement of relevant community agencies. Students must know when and under what circumstances they will return to a regular classroom. Because persistent misbehavior is often a sign of academic distress, it is imperative that staff provide all students assigned to alternative settings with an appropriate academic program that includes credit-earning course work.

States, districts, and schools must consistently monitor the number and length of suspensions, expulsions, and placements in alternative settings to ensure that rates are not too high and that particular groups of students, especially minority students, are not disproportionately disciplined. Generally, if rates are greater than 5 percent, behavioral supports in the classroom and the schoolwide program are insufficient.

Supporting evidence. The U.S. Department of Education (2000) summarizes the characteristics of effective alternative programs and schools. In addition, opportunities for student influence and a caring orientation have been identified as important factors in studies of effective "alternative schools" (summarized in Duke, 1990). See also Gottfredson et al. (2000), which summarizes characteristics of effective school programs related to delinquency prevention.

Although research on the effects of suspension and expulsion is limited, the research that does exist does not show positive effects on the suspended or expelled students (Toby & Scrupsky, 1990). Verdugo (2000b) reviews evidence that expelled or suspended students are more likely to become further alienated and to drop out of school. There is also evidence that suspension and expulsion are disproportionately meted out to minority students (Gregory, 1997; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Skiba & Reece, 1997; Townsend, 2000), even when controlling for differences in the rate of actual misbehavior (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Wu, 1982).

Core Element 3: Involvement of Families, Students, School Staff, and the Surrounding Community

Students are more likely to feel safe and supported and are more likely to achieve academically when there is a positive and respectful relationship between their families and their school. While every school staff has strong relationships with *some* parents, schools should strive to partner with the families of every single student in the school. In our increasingly diverse society, achieving these school-family partnerships often requires bridging differences of race, income, educational background, culture, and expectations.

To foster meaningful family involvement, both students and parents should be actively involved in determining the school's basic values, goals, rules, and safety measures. They should have regular opportunities to assess the working relations between school and family and devise ways to strengthen them. They should also regularly receive data on student and school performance, presented in a way that they understand.

Schools should also encourage parents to visit the school frequently; participate in school activities, school planning, and school events; make presentations to the students and faculty; and develop mutually supportive relationships with school staff and administrators. Parents can be called on to communicate discipline policies and procedures and help the school maintain discipline.

A school can encourage parent involvement by scheduling activities so they fit into parent work schedules, taking advantage of parent skills and knowledge, and offering a variety of projects that meet the needs of both parents and school staff. In addition, a school should provide opportunities for parents to learn how they can help their children, such as workshops on parenting skills and homework assistance. Active outreach efforts such as home visits reinforce the staff's commitment to nurturing students and engaging families in their children's education.

Many teachers and administrators are not trained in relating to parents and promoting parent involvement. Such training is essential, because when educators treat parents as partners and put them at ease, parents often put aside their hesitations about getting involved. One step educators can take is to increase the frequency of their communication with parents by focusing, whenever appropriate, on students' strengths and not just on weaknesses. Educators can also make it easier for parents to initiate contact by inviting and encouraging them to write, call, or visit whenever they have concerns.

Involving the community is also essential. Families and schools often need complementary community resources to create a strong web of healthy opportunities and support to help students become competent, caring, ethical, and healthy adults. Links with other members of the community, including youth-serving organizations, faith-based organizations, parks and recreation departments, local law enforcement agencies, health and social services, and businesses are valuable

for all schools, but especially for schools whose families have few outside resources or whose neighborhoods have high rates of violence and crime. The entire community has a stake in ensuring a bright future for young people, and schools should rely on and work with other community institutions toward that end. Schools should not be expected to manage or coordinate these supports alone; community partners must play a vital role as well.

When a school is warm and welcoming—sponsoring book fairs, welcoming community groups for after-school student activities or civic meetings, inviting neighborhood children to use the playground—it becomes a center of the community, viewed by residents as an important resource and meeting place and as an institution that "belongs" to the neighborhood and can help promote its goals and values. When the school becomes a vital part of the community, families are more engaged and residents of the community work with the school to see that the school is a safe place for students to learn in.

When external resources are brought together strategically, the school has access to additional outside supports for students that need them. These additional supports can range from after-school activities to internships to health and social services. When students need special supports and interventions in order to succeed in school, the school refers them and their families to appropriate community resources. Additional benefits of these school-community collaborations include real-world examples of the connections between schooling and the workplace as well as opportunities for student service learning activities.

"You have to start with the students. If you can somehow make them feel like they have a place in the world, then they want to learn more about how to live in that world."

—High school student

Supporting evidence. Many studies show that family involvement in children's learning is a critical element of student success. Henderson and Berla (1987, 1994) and Epstein (1991, 1996) cite numerous studies showing that the participation of parents and other family members in children's schooling has broad positive effects for students, families, and schools. When families are involved at school, not just at home, children do better in school and stay in school longer (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Several studies have provided qualitative evidence showing the positive effects of community involvement (Comer, 1986; Haynes & Comer, 1996; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). A special example of school-family-community partnerships are community schools, which generally are open to students, families, and community members before, during, and after school; provide a variety of opportunities and supports; and are operated by partnerships of school systems and community agencies. A review of community school evaluations found evidence of improvements in one or more of the following areas: academic achievement, school attendance, suspension rates, family involvement, family functioning, access to services, and neighborhood safety (Dryfoos, 2000).

For a general discussion of the importance of school-family-community connections and descriptions of strategies for enhancing them, see U.S. Department of Education (1994) and Epstein (1996).

Core Element 4: Standards and Measures to Support Continuous Improvement Based on Data

Our central premise is that schools that are safe and supportive learning communities help students grow academically while also fostering their social, emotional, and ethical growth. These schools help students avoid problem behaviors such as truancy, violence, and drug use, and help them gain the competence and independence to be responsible and contributing members of their school and their larger community.

The decade-long effort to improve student performance has rightly focused on setting academic standards, measuring progress toward meeting those standards, and providing the resources and supports to make attainment of high standards possible. The same approach, which has been effective in advancing academic achievement, should be used to foster safe and supportive school communities that enable students to thrive socially, psychologically, ethically, *and* academically.

For states, districts, and schools to achieve safe and supportive learning communities, they must make a long-term, public commitment to this goal and develop standards that give it substance. As in other areas, though, standards alone cannot assure improvement. Resources and supports must be available to help schools meet these standards; progress toward this end must be measured, and the results used, in order to ensure continuous improvement.

States can, of course, set relevant standards at several levels: for school systems, schools, and students. While there are many approaches to developing such standards, we suggest that they address the core elements identified in this action plan. Districts and schools can add to these core standards in ways that meet their particular needs. Care should be taken at the state, district, and school levels to involve representative students, parents, and community leaders in setting standards.

Maintaining a safe and supportive school requires a solid sense of the current school climate and a continuous improvement process for measuring progress and making appropriate corrections. At the school level, information about school atmosphere and safety issues should be collected periodically, ensuring that the perspectives of various community members are represented. To track whether a safe, supportive learning community is being provided to *all* students *all* of the time (in the classroom, the hallways, the cafeterias, etc.), key indicators should assess strengths (opportunities for every child to participate in extracurricular or other

after-school activities, availability of high-quality alternative placements) as well as deficits (rates of disciplinary action, rates of truancy).

Indicator data on safety and the school's social environment should be gathered from teachers, other school staff, students, and parents. These same stakeholders should be involved in analyzing the data and in the decision making that follows. Schools routinely keep some types of data, such as the number of discipline referrals per unit of time. Other information (for example, levels of school connectedness) may need to be gathered through periodic surveys of students, teachers, and others. Gathered data should then be systematically reported and *used* to identify and guide needed improvements.

Survey questionnaires for teachers, principals, students, and parents are among the self-study tools currently available to schools, districts, and states. These questionnaires can be used to collect information about classroom practices, instructional and curricular integration, decision-making practices, parent and community involvement, climate and attitudes, professional development needs, educational expectations, school safety, student health behaviors, and student well-being. Other sources of relevant information include attendance and vandalism records, discipline referrals, and suspension and expulsion reports.

Results of the self-study should then be used to identify needs and gaps and to document the impact of changes that have been undertaken. Performance on key measures should be publicly reported and results should be disaggregated to show the relative performance of schools with varying percentages of low-income and minority students and, within a school, to show the relative performance of various groups of students.

An important challenge here is to recognize that some data are subjective in that they reflect the personal perceptions of students, parents, and staff. Such measures should not be used as accountability tools designed to reward or punish schools. Instead, they should provide a way of channeling assistance to schools and helping states, schools, and districts align curriculum, deliver professional development and resources, and pursue continuous improvement.

At the school level, a schoolwide team charged with setting goals in relation to state and district standards and designing and implementing a comprehensive plan promoting achievement, safety, and community should oversee this process. For a continuous improvement process to be effective, districts and schools should ensure that teams are adequately trained in data analysis, including basic techniques for summarizing and interpreting data and identifying trends. The training should be provided to teams *before* they set goals, select indicators and measures, and collect data relevant to achievement, climate, and safety standards.

The topics addressed in a continuous improvement process can range widely, and could include strengthening the sense of school community; assessing the general impact of various instructional approaches, school and class activities, opportunities for service, and discipline codes; assessing the specific interventions for

students with persistent behavior problems; appraising parent and community outreach activities; evaluating physical aspects of the school environment that have implications for safety and climate (e.g., lighting, exits, design and location of bathrooms, traffic patterns, noise levels in cafeteria); and evaluating more traditional security measures (locked doors, alarm systems, identification procedures, metal detectors) intended to protect the school from outside risks.

Supporting evidence. A wide variety of tools have been developed to assist schools in collecting and analyzing data from students, teachers, families, school records, and other sources in their efforts to foster safe and supportive learning communities including:

- The Search Institute Profiles of Student Life, which creates a portrait of the developmental assets and deficits that affect young people's behavior based on an inventory of 40 assets that the Search Institute has identified as contributing to healthy youth development (www.search-institute.org).
- The School Improvement Self-Study, developed by the Center for Prevention Research and Development at the University of Illinois and the Illinois Middle School Association, which surveys classroom practices, integration of instruction and curricula; decision-making practices, parent and community involvement, climate and attitudes, professional development needs, educational expectations, school safety, student health behaviors, and student well-being (www.cprd.uiuc.edu).
- The Communities That Care Youth Survey, created by Developmental Research and Programs Inc., which measures alcohol and drug abuse, delinquency, gang involvement, and risk and protective factors impacting a community's adolescent population (www.drp.org).
- The Child Development Project, created by the Developmental Studies Center, which surveys levels of classroom and school community and supportiveness (www.devstu.org).
- The Effective School Battery, which measures and reports on school safety, staff morale, administrative leadership, fairness and clarity of school rules, respect for students, classroom orderliness, academic climate, school rewards, student educational expectations, attachment to school, and other aspects of school climate as reflected in teachers' and students' perceptions, behavior, and attitudes (www.gottfredson.com).
- The Schoolwide Information System, developed at the University of Oregon, which tracks and analyzes information about school discipline events (www.swis.org).

For further descriptions regarding the use of school discipline data see Sugai, Sprague, Horner, and Walker (2000) and Lewis-Palmer, Sugai, and Larson (1999). In addition, individual schools can adapt instruments that have been developed to assess school violence and other problems from national surveys (Kingery, Coggeshall, & Alford, 1998) in order to monitor their own needs and changing conditions.

While most of these tools are used by individual schools, the state of Rhode Island uses a survey called the School Accountability for Learning and Teaching to collect school data on such categories as classroom practice, parent and community involvement, climate and attitudes, school safety, and overall student well-being as part of a mandated, comprehensive statewide school improvement process (www.ridoe.net).

Recommendations

Ensuring that all students experience their schools as safe and supportive communities is an enormous undertaking. The Learning First Alliance suggests that four core elements are essential to creating safe and supportive school communities that foster high academic achievement. We propose a series of actions that teachers, administrators, parents, students, policymakers, and other stakeholders might take to support the creation of a safe and supportive learning community. We believe that these recommendations are applicable to every school and community, although how they are implemented will vary, as will the resources and intensity of supports necessary to implement them, depending on the needs and strengths of each community. We also stress that these recommendations are not mere "add-ons." Rather, they are essential to holistic, systemic improvement of student learning.

Our first overarching recommendation is simply to recognize that there is an *essential connection* between efforts to improve student achievement and efforts to create safe and supportive school communities. Most of the recommendations that follow focus specifically on building safe and supportive school communities, but throughout, we assume that districts and schools have in place standards that embody high expectations in the core content areas, coupled with a challenging and engaging curriculum for all students. The metaphor of the three-legged stool applies here: high expectations, an engaging and challenging curriculum, and a safe and supportive context are all essential to school effectiveness and student success.

Our remaining recommendations fall into five categories:

- Engaging students, school staff, and the surrounding community.
- Standards and measures to support continuous improvement.
- Professional development for all school staff.
- Structures and supports.
- Research and development.

Finally, we outline specific steps that the Learning First Alliance will take to help carry out these recommendations.

"I wouldn't want to bring any of my problems up with the teachers at my school. It feels as though I'm just one more person in the assembly line going through the classes. The teachers don't really stop to get to know you."

—Chris, high school student

Engaging Students, Families, School Staff, and the Surrounding Community

Fully engaging the entire school community is essential to creating and maintaining schools in which students feel connected, respected, safe, and supported.

To achieve this objective, we must

- Strive to establish a supportive and respectful relationship between schools and every family in the school community and establish and implement state, district, and school policies and practices that support this goal.
- Foster communitywide and schoolwide conversations about what kind of school the community wants to have and how they would know it if they saw it. These conversations should set goals, indicators, and strategies for both students and schools in relationship to state standards. While participants in these conversations will vary by community, they generally should include students, parents, school staff, administrators, school board members, and some representatives from higher education, business, community-based organizations, the faith community, mental health and social service providers, and law enforcement. Particular care should be taken to solicit input from students and parents whose voices are not always recognized in these conversations.
- Use school teams to oversee comprehensive schoolwide approaches and to ensure appropriate supports for students who need them. With district support, schools should have in place two teams: a schoolwide team and a student support team. The school should ensure that these teams coordinate with each other and with any other existing teams.
  - *The schoolwide support team* should analyze data relevant to achievement, climate, and safety; set goals and indicators in relationship to state and district standards; and design and implement a comprehensive and consistent plan to promote a safe and supportive learning community. The schoolwide team should include the principal, teachers, school counselor and/or mental health professional, parents, and students. To ensure effective use and coordination of community resources, the team should, whenever possible, involve representatives from important partners such as higher education, business, community-based organizations, the faith community, mental health and social service providers, and law enforcement.
  - *The student support team* should oversee consultation, evaluation, referral, and/or intervention for students with behavioral and academic difficulties. The student support team should include the principal, at least one teacher and mental health professional who also participate in the

schoolwide support team, classroom teachers, parents, special educators, and health and social service agency providers.

- Implement the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs, which provide standards and performance indicators in communicating, parenting, student learning, volunteering, school decision making and advocacy, and collaborating with community.

Standards and Measures to Support Continuous Improvement

The decade-long effort to raise academic standards has rightly focused the nation on measuring and boosting achievement. However, as a result, insufficient attention is often paid to developing the safe and supportive learning communities that help high academic achievement flourish. Thus, we must

- Set state and district standards for school systems, schools, and students that identify communities' goals and vision of safe and supportive learning communities. While there are many approaches to developing such standards, we suggest that they reflect the core elements identified in this action plan: a safe and supportive learning community, systematic approaches to supporting positive behavior, and involvement of families, students, school staff, and the surrounding community.
- Align curriculum, student supports, professional development, policies, and resources to these standards.
- Use data to focus and monitor school and district improvement efforts. The measures should assess strengths (such as levels of connectedness, opportunities for every child to participate in extracurricular or other after-school activities, availability of high-quality alternative placements) as well as deficits (rates of disciplinary action, rates of truancy).
- Publicly report performance on key measures and disaggregate data to show the relative performance of schools with varying percentages of low-income and minority students and to show the relative performance of various subgroups of students within a school.
- Ensure that schoolwide support teams have adequate training to collect and analyze data gathered on key measures in order to use in guiding schools' continuous improvement efforts.

Creating standards for, and measures of, safe and supportive learning communities is a complex and challenging task. Just 10 years ago, states and districts began learning how to develop academic standards and aligned, high-quality assessments of student performance. We are just learning how to develop standards and measures for safe and supportive learning communities. Thus, at this early stage, relevant data should only be used for program design and improvement purposes, and not to rank, reward, or punish schools and districts.

Professional Development for All School Staff

Students will not experience schools as safe and supportive learning communities unless both beginning and experienced teachers are skilled in providing students with strong academic programs and are able to manage the classroom in ways that promote instruction and learning and result in student cooperation and engagement. A principal who functions as an effective instructional and community leader is critical to developing and maintaining consistent, schoolwide approaches to creating a safe and supportive learning community. Moreover, other school staff, including counselors, coaches, aides, security personnel, bus drivers, and custodial workers are important resources for creating safe and supportive learning communities in every location and during every hour of the school day. We must

- Ensure that the state and professional standards, to which pre-service and continuing education programs (including alternative certification programs) must adhere, emphasize that teachers, principals, and other school staff have expertise in creating and maintaining a safe and supportive learning community, including
  - State licensure standards and/or the proposed Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards for beginning school personnel;
  - State program standards used by state agencies to regulate pre-service and continuing education programs;
  - Professional certification standards for teachers, specifically those used by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), that govern the continuing education of teachers; and
  - Professional accreditation standards used by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) for units that prepare school personnel and provide continuing education.
- Facilitate the efforts of the university-based faculty, with their K–12 school partners, to revise pre-service and continuing education programs so these efforts align with state and professional standards for both safe and supportive learning communities and the contribution of school staff to creating and sustaining such schools.
- Ensure that teacher preparation (including alternative certification pathways) and ongoing staff development emphasize the following strategies, methods, and understandings:
  - Techniques that promote student responsibility, decision making, and self discipline, including specific strategies for establishing and enforcing classroom rules and resolving student conflicts;
  - Strategies to work effectively with students from diverse backgrounds;
  - Instructional methods that foster high expectations, self-direction,

autonomy, collaboration, respect, and mutually supportive relationships in the classroom;

- Effective methods for identifying students at risk of behavioral problems and appropriate avenues for making referrals and designing additional supports;
- Strategies to communicate and work in partnership with parents;
- Ways to effectively use data to improve programs and instruction; and
- Ways to work across the school to implement and maintain consistent approaches to create safe and supportive learning communities.

Structures and Supports

Creating and maintaining safe and supportive learning communities requires attention to social relations, physical setting, supports and services, and resources. Guidelines for each of these areas are as follows.

Social relations.

- Put in place policies and programs to create and support smaller, more personal learning communities in which all students are known well by at least one adult. Important strategies to consider include class-size reduction, team teaching, student advisories, and looping (in which students have the same teacher or teachers for several years). In addition, all staff should be charged with forging strong connections with students and getting to know them personally.
- Foster respectful, supportive relationships among students, teachers, and community and clear avenues for communication that create an environment in which students are comfortable reporting concerns and needs about their own lives and about the behavior of others in the school community at the classroom, school building, district, and state levels.
- Create policies and budgets to ensure that all new schools built are significantly smaller than the current norm. For larger existing schools, create schools-within-schools or other types of self-contained units to achieve the goal of smaller schools.

Physical setting.

- Ensure that when building or remodeling schools, the physical layout promotes safety and community, including consideration of classroom layout, hallways, sight lines, locker placement, entrances, and communal spaces.
- Increase support for school construction to ensure that no child attends a crumbling, hazardous school.

Services and supports.

- Design and fund districtwide or cross-district approaches to providing a continuum of high-quality intensive support services and

alternative placements for the small number of students who need them. While alternatives to suspension and expulsion are costly, states and districts must fund them to ensure that students with significant behavioral problems do not disrupt the learning of other students and receive the necessary support to improve their behavior and graduate from school as able and productive members of society.

- Establish state and district policies that foster effective services for children and families through cooperative arrangements among the local public and private agencies that work with children and families.

Resources.

- Provide funding for research-based, comprehensive approaches to promoting safe and supportive learning communities. This should include use of funds from the federal Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act in support of proven schoolwide improvement strategies.
- Put in place federal funding that enables higher education-based teacher and principal preparation programs, in collaboration with local K–12 school partners, to design new and/or revise existing programs so that candidates acquire skills and understandings necessary to create and sustain safe and supportive learning environments.

Research and Development

Large-scale changes in belief and practice should be based on a body of sound research that convinces us that changes will promote improved outcomes for students. In the area of safe and supportive learning communities, much of the current research focuses on specific, narrow interventions for particular student populations. We must substantially increase funding for a long-term, comprehensive program of research and development of effective practices. Priorities for increased attention include:

- Research on the four core elements identified in this paper, with particular attention to how specific strategies for creating and maintain-

ing a safe and supportive learning community interact and contribute to a comprehensive, whole-school improvement effort;

- Development and field-testing of standards and measures that states, districts, and schools can use to monitor progress; and
- Translation of research into forms usable and accessible by educators, policymakers, students, and families seeking to improve their schools.

Role of the Learning First Alliance

To help ensure these recommendations are implemented, the Learning First Alliance and its members will work diligently to help schools create safe, supportive learning communities by

- Providing guidance on how to integrate efforts to create and maintain safe and supportive learning communities with systemic efforts to improve student achievement.
- Analyzing and disseminating existing standards, indicators, measures, and associated materials that promote safe and supportive learning communities and help states, districts, and schools monitor progress in creating such schools. Working with the federal government, states, districts, researchers, and other relevant partners, encourage the creation of effective model standards, indicators, and measures.
- Providing educators, policymakers and parents with information and guidance on model programs and research-based best practices for creating safe and supportive learning communities.
- Promoting efforts by state Learning First Alliances to establish effective state policies and programs related to safe and supportive learning communities.
- Incorporating the core elements of safe and supportive learning communities in all of the Alliance's future work, including effective professional practice.
- Disseminating the information in this action plan broadly, in appropriate format, to educators, policymakers, parents, and the public. As part of this commitment, member organizations will focus on the issue of safe and supportive learning communities through their meetings, publications, and policymaking activities.

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Sidebar Quotes

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The Learning First Alliance

The Learning First Alliance is a permanent partnership of 12 leading educational associations that have come together to improve student learning in America's public elementary and secondary schools. Members of the Alliance represent more than 10 million Americans engaged in providing, governing, and improving public education.

Our nation's public schools are the key to our future. They are an essential vehicle for ensuring that young people enter adulthood with the knowledge, skills, and moral character to be productive members of our diverse and democratic society.

The Alliance is an unprecedented, self-initiated commitment to develop and deliver a common message to all parts of the education system, align priorities, share and disseminate success stories, encourage collaboration at every level, and work toward the continual and long-term improvement of public education based on solid research.

The Learning First Alliance works with and through its member organizations to achieve the following three goals. We commit our 12 organizations to these interrelated goals, which are central to our mission of improving student learning in America's public elementary and secondary schools.

First, the Alliance works to ensure that high academic expectations are held for all students. States and school districts should have high academic standards for their core subjects. These standards should lay out clearly and specifically what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade level, sequence of grade levels, or other specific checkpoints. This specificity will ensure that educators, students, parents, policymakers, school board members, and the public all share an understanding of, and commitment to, what is expected of students. The standards of local school districts should be consistent with those set by states, but need not be limited to them.

To provide all students the opportunity to achieve these standards, policies, curriculum, instruction, materials, facilities, technologies, educator preparation, continuing professional development, assessment, school structures, and delivery systems must be in alignment. Students who need extra help should receive timely and intensive interventions, and students should not be promoted to higher levels of schooling without meeting the standards. Student assessments should enhance learning and enable all stakeholders to know whether students are meeting the standards.

Educators must be prepared in the specific subjects they teach. In addition, teachers and other school personnel should be equipped to make judgments about the extent to which students are meeting the standards, diagnose student needs, and provide particular interventions so that all students may succeed.

Second, the Alliance works to ensure a safe and supportive place of learning for all students. Schools should be fair, caring, and effective learning communities that are free from intimidation or fear. All students should be able to attend schools in which they are known and valued, their overall progress is monitored and supported by at least one adult, they are provided clear and rigorous expectations of behavior and academic performance, and they feel connected to their school community. Individual schools and school districts should address the ways that students learn best and accommodate children with special needs. Moreover, appropriate and rigorous alternative placements should be available to address the needs of students whose behavior is disruptive to the education of other students.

All adults within schools should work together to create safe and supportive learning communities by modeling behaviors that demonstrate the highest levels of respect, responsibility, character, and civility. Further, school districts and individuals should adopt and enforce clear codes of conduct for all students so that school personnel, students, and parents will share an understanding of the behavior that is expected of students and the consequences for not meeting those expectations. Teachers and other school personnel should receive training in the knowledge and skills necessary to create safe and supportive learning environments, including effective classroom management practices.

In addition, teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, and other school leaders should put in place policies that reflect the best research on creating safe and supportive learning environments. Finally, all those involved with the delivery of public education should become advocates on behalf of youth to promote safe, healthy, orderly, and supportive communities beyond the walls of the school.

Third, the Alliance works to engage parents and other community members in helping students achieve high academic expectations. States and local school districts should maximize the ways that parents and community members can participate in schools. For example, community members and parents should participate in the development of standards, programs, and assessments that affect students' academic performance. Families should be encouraged to participate in all facets of the child's education. Public schools should develop partnerships with businesses, civic organizations, and other community groups to promote adult participation in children's education and to maximize the resources available to support learning. Teachers and other school personnel should be trained in effective practices that support parenting and parent involvement.

The Alliance believes that communities should hold schools accountable for the achievement of these three goals. To achieve these goals, the Alliance is committed to working with local and state members to organize collaborative action at the state and local levels, providing concrete and useful tools for educators, and articulating to the education community and to policymakers important new developments in the improvement of the American education enterprise.

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